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BATMAN
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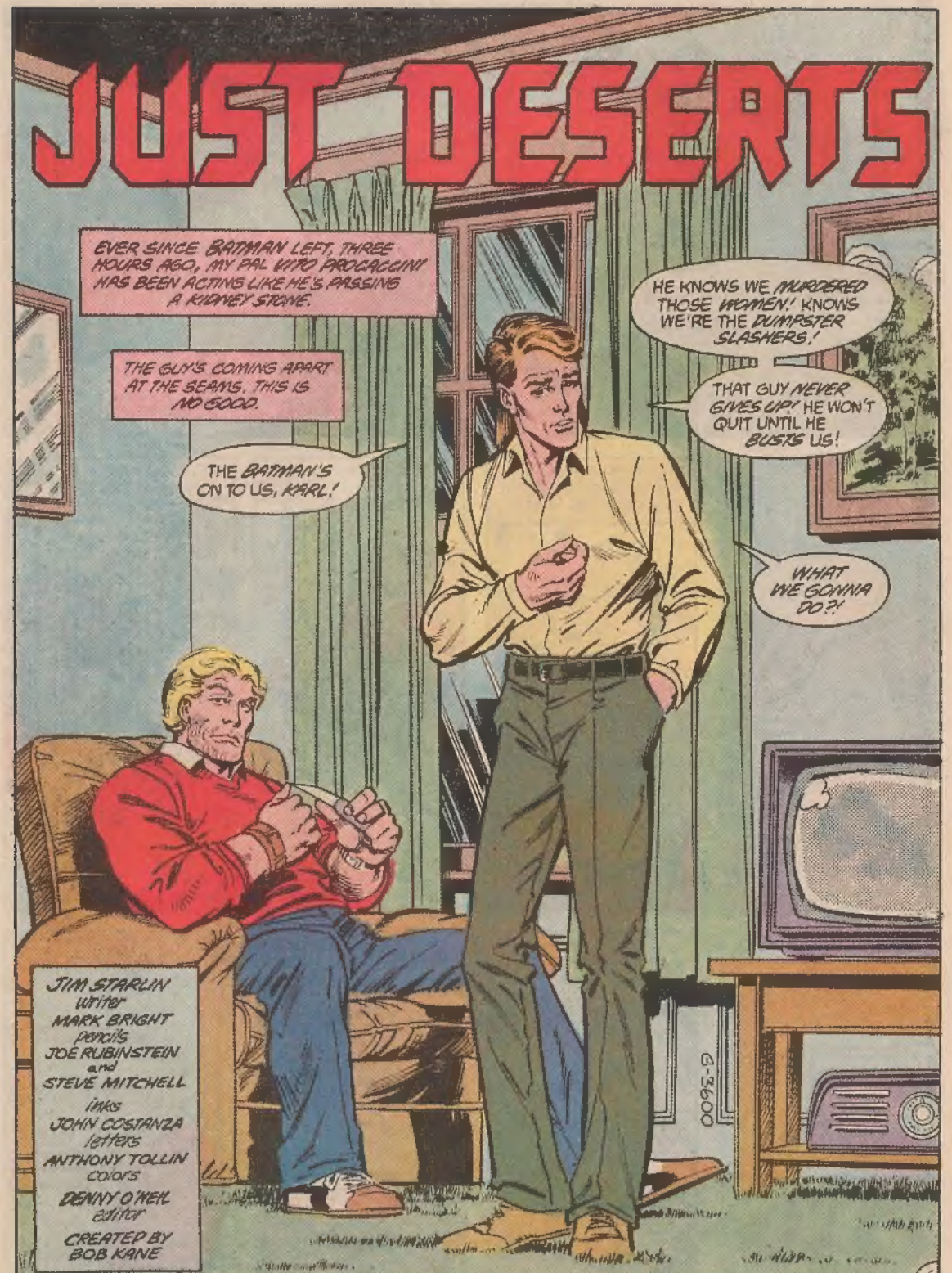
JUST DESERTS
EVER SINCE BATMAN LEFT, THREE HOURS AGO, MY PAL VITO PROCACCINI HAS BEEN ACTING LIKE HE'S PASSING A KIDNEY STONE.
THE GUY'S COMING APART AT THE SEAMS. THIS IS NO GOOD.
THE BATMAN'S ON TO US, KARL!
HE KNOWS WE MURDERED THOSE WOMEN! KNOWS WE'RE THE DUMPSTER SLASHERS!
THAT GUY NEVER GIVES UP! HE WON'T QUIT UNTIL HE BUSTS US!
WHAT WE GONNA DO?!
JIM STARLIN writer
MARK BRIGHT pencils
JOE RUBINSTEIN and STEVE MITCHELL inks
JOHN COSTANZA letters
ANTHONY TOLLIN colors
DENNY O'NEIL editor
CREATED BY BOB KANE

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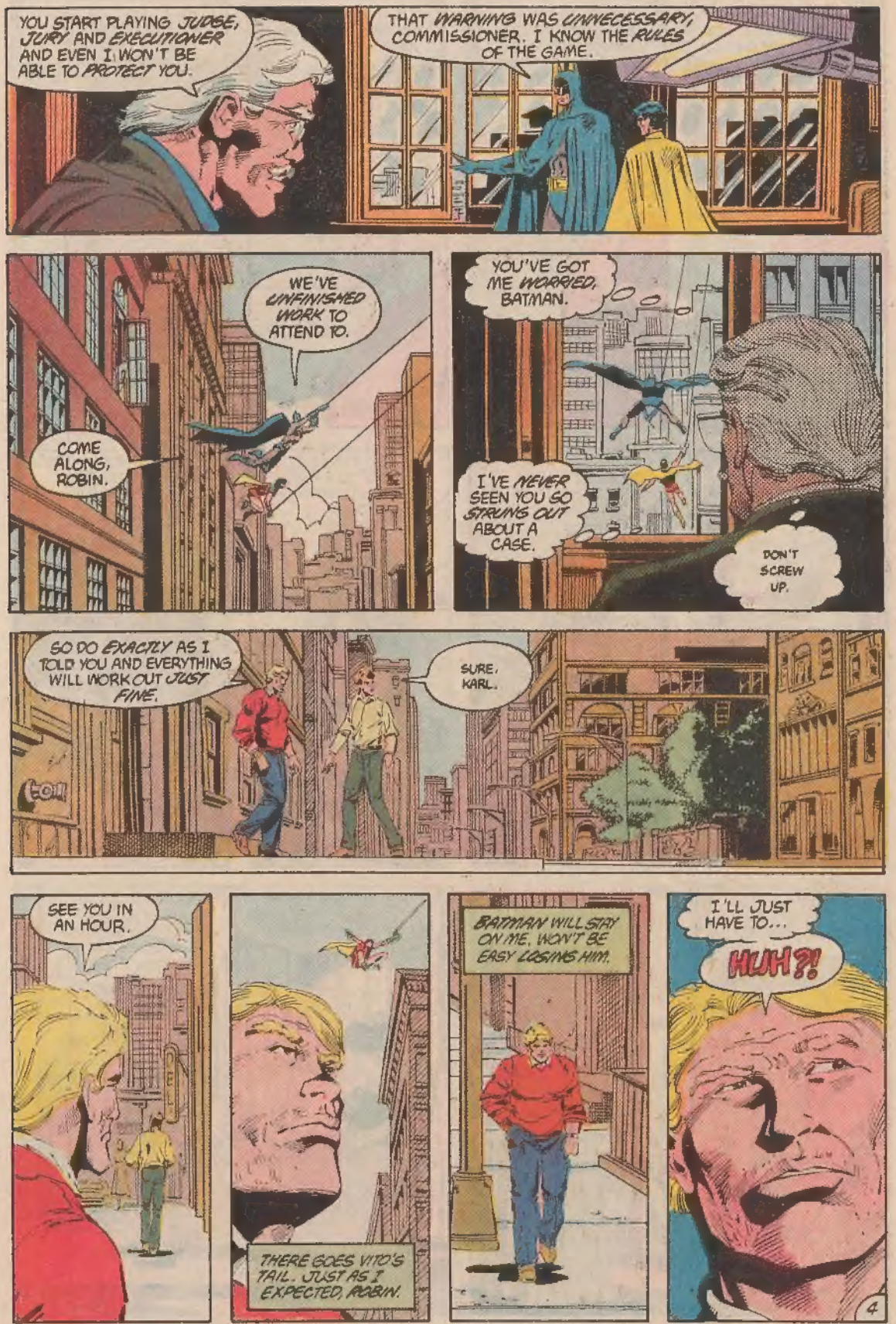
DON'T SWEAT IT, VITO. I GOT THE SITUATION WELL IN HAND.
ALL WE NEED IS ONE MORE KILLING TO GET THE BATMAN OFF OUR BACKS.
I STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU'VE GOT IN MIND.
IT'S BEST YOU DON'T KNOW THE DETAILS, IN CASE BATMAN GRABS YOU.
YOU AFRAID I'LL TALK, BRANNECK?
A LITTLE PRESSURE, YOU'LL SQUEAL LIKE A STUCK PIG, VITO.
YOU'RE A WEAK LINK.
IT AIN'T THAT, PAL.
THIS BATMAN DON'T PLAY FAIR.
HE'S GOT WAYS OF BREAKING PEOPLE.
IF YOU GOT NOTHING TO SPILL, HE CAN'T TALK IT OUT OF YOU.
WHY'D I EVER LET YOU TALK ME INTO THIS MESS?
'CAUSE WE SEE HOW CRAZY THE WORLD'S GOTTEN, THAT'S WHY!
NO ONE KNOWS WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A REAL MAN ANYMORE.
THEM BROADS IS TURNING EVERYBODY INTO A BUNCH OF WIMPS.
ALL THIS WOMEN'S LIB CRAPOLA HAS GOT EVERYONE MIXED UP.
2

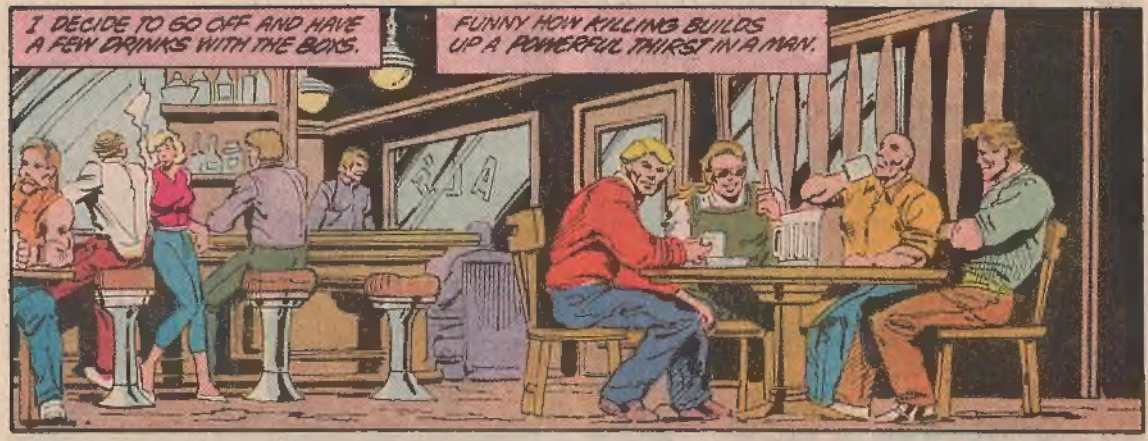
SOMEONE HAD TO SHOW THEM HOW REAL MEN SHOULD ACT.
THOSE TRAMPS HAVE GOTTEN TOO UPPITY. HAD TO BE PUT BACK IN THEIR PLACE.
IT'S THE NATURAL ORDER OF THINGS, MAN BEING THE BOSS.
HELL, AIN'T NO CRIME WE COMMITTED. IT WAS A POLITICAL STATEMENT.
APPARENTLY, THEY PICKED THEIR TEN VICTIMS AT RANDOM.
THEY THEN HAD THEIR SICK WAY WITH THESE POOR WOMEN.
AND THEN THEY TOOK A KNIFE TO THEIR VICTIMS, BUTCHERED THEM.
THEN THEY DISPOSED OF THE BODIES AT THE NEAREST AVAILABLE TRASH DUMPSTER. THE FINAL INSULT.
THE MEN OF THIS STATE OUGHT TO GIVE US A MEDAL.
I SWEAR I WILL PUT AN END TO THEIR DEPRAVITY.
REMEMBER THERE ARE BOUNDARIES, EVEN FOR YOU, BATMAN.
YOUR STATUS AS GOTHAM'S SEMI-OFFICIAL VIGILANTE IS A TENUOUS POSITION, AT BEST.
3


YOU START PLAYING JUDGE, JURY AND EXECUTIONER AND EVEN I WON'T BE ABLE TO PROTECT YOU.
THAT WARNING WAS UNNECESSARY, COMMISSIONER. I KNOW THE RULES OF THE GAME.
WE'VE UNFINISHED WORK TO ATTEND TO.
COME ALONG, ROBIN.
YOU'VE GOT ME WORRIED, BATMAN.
I'VE NEVER SEEN YOU SO STRUNG OUT ABOUT A CASE.
DON'T SCREW UP.
SO DO EXACTLY AS I TOLD YOU AND EVERYTHING WILL WORK OUT JUST FINE.
SURE, KARL.
SEE YOU IN AN HOUR.
THERE GOES VITO'S TAIL. JUST AS I EXPECTED, ROBIN.
BATMAN WILL STAY ON ME. WON'T BE EASY LOSING HIM.
I'LL JUST HAVE TO...
HUH?!
4

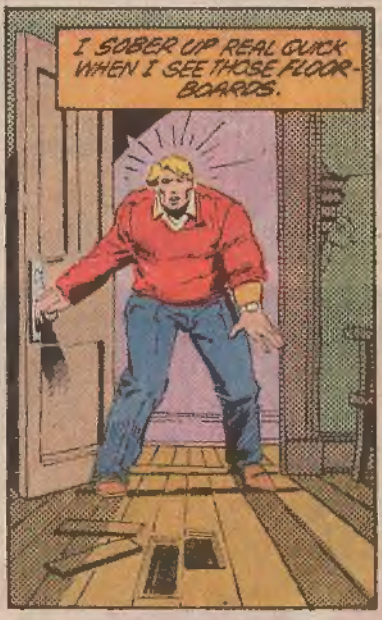
IT'S THAT BROAD AGAIN!
SEEMS LIKE EVERY TIME I TURN AROUND LATELY, SHE'S THERE.
STARING.
SHE NEVER SAYS ANYTHING.
JUST STANDS THERE, GAWKING AT ME.
WHAT'S SHE WANT?
CAN'T WORRY ABOUT HER NOW.
GOTTA CONCENTRATE ON SHAKING BATMAN.
I SPEND THE NEXT FORTY-FIVE MINUTES DIVING IN AND OUT OF JOINTS, LOSING MYSELF IN CROWDS, DOUBLING BACK, TAKING SUBWAYS, DOING ANYTHING I HAVE TO, TO LOSE BATMAN. THE MAN'S GOOD, BUT NOT EVEN HE'S GOOD ENOUGH TO STAY WITH ME ONCE I DECIDE TO SHAKE A TAIL.
EXIT
5

YES, SIR. THE OL' BATWIMP'S ABOUT TO LEARN HE'S FINALLY COME UP AGAINST HIS EQUAL.
LOST HIM.
VITO, YOU HERE YET?
VITO?!
YEAH, RIGHT HERE.
YOU LOSE THE BIRD-BOY OKAY?
SURE, IT WAS EASY. KID'S OBVIOUSLY STILL PRETTY GREEN.
WHAT DO WE DO NOW?
WE TAKE CARE OF THAT LAST HIT WE TALKED ABOUT.
I STILL DON'T LIKE THE IDEA OF ANOTHER KILLING, KARL.
IT HAS TO BE DONE, VITO.
WELL, WHO'S THE MARK GONNA BE?
A WEAK LINK.

UGHHH!
KARL
SORRY, OL' BUDDY.
COULDN'T TRUST YOU NOT TO CRACK AND SPILL YOUR GUTS.
KARL...
I COULDN'T TAKE THE CHANCE OF ME GOING TO JAIL, VITO.
YOU SEE, MY HOOK'S NOT DONE YET.
THERE'S STILL A LOT OF BUMBOS OUT THERE WHO NEED STRAIGHTENING OUT.
14 STREET
14 STREET
THE TRAIN WON'T LEAVE ENOUGH OF YOU TO SHOW HOW YOU REALLY DIED.
BATMAN AND THE COPS WILL HAVE TO ACCEPT A RULING OF ACCIDENTAL DEATH.
AIN'T NOTHING THEY CAN PIN ON ME.
I'M HOME FREE.
7


I DECIDE TO GO OFF AND HAVE A FEW DRINKS WITH THE BOYS.
FUNNY HOW KILLING BUILDS UP A POWERFUL THIRST IN A MAN.

COME 4 A.M. THEY CLOSE THE BAR AND I HEAD HOME.
GOT A LITTLE BUZZ ON.


I SOBER UP REAL QUICK WHEN I SEE THOSE FLOOR-BOARDS.

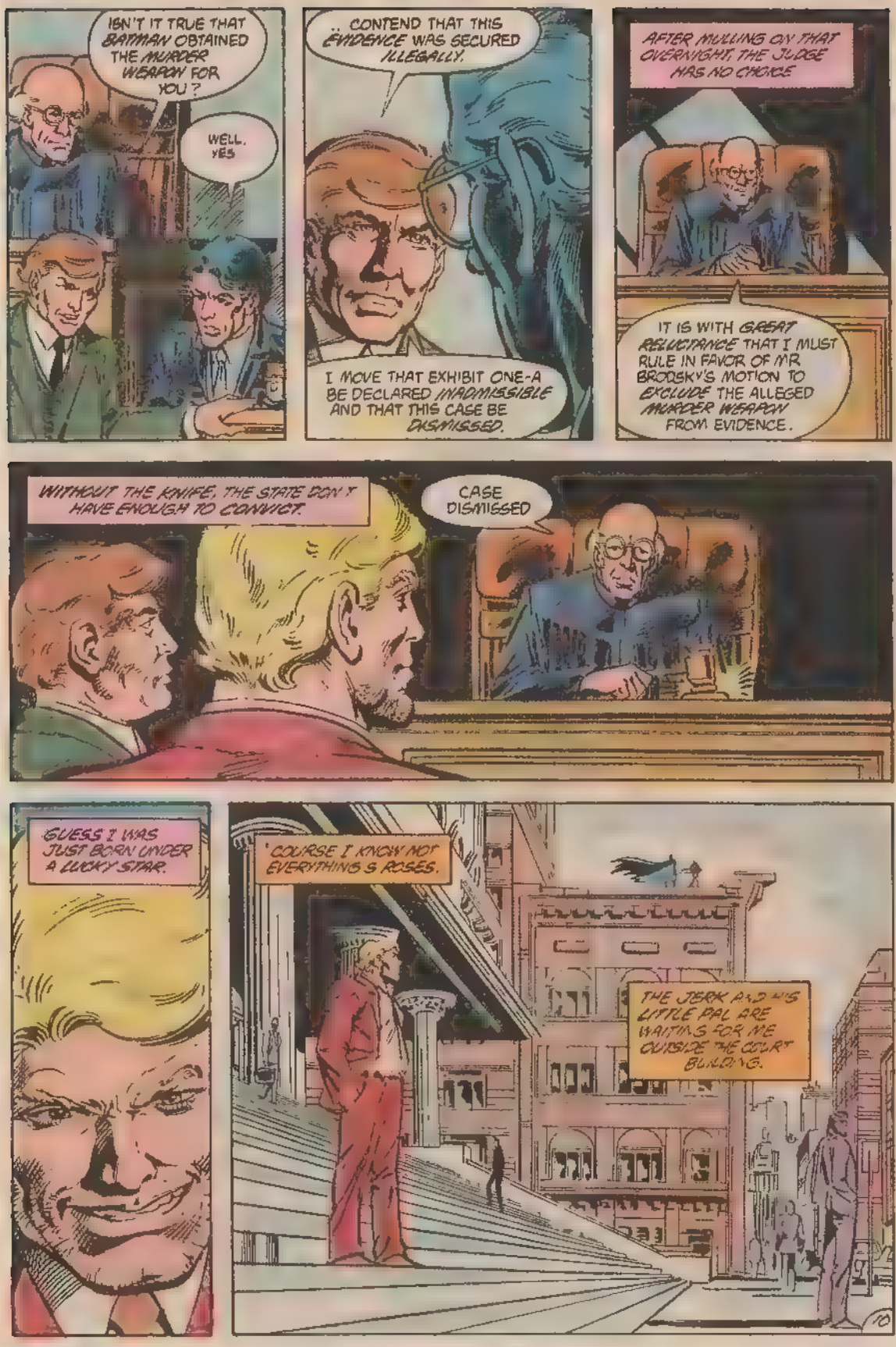
WONDERING IF I FOUND THIS?

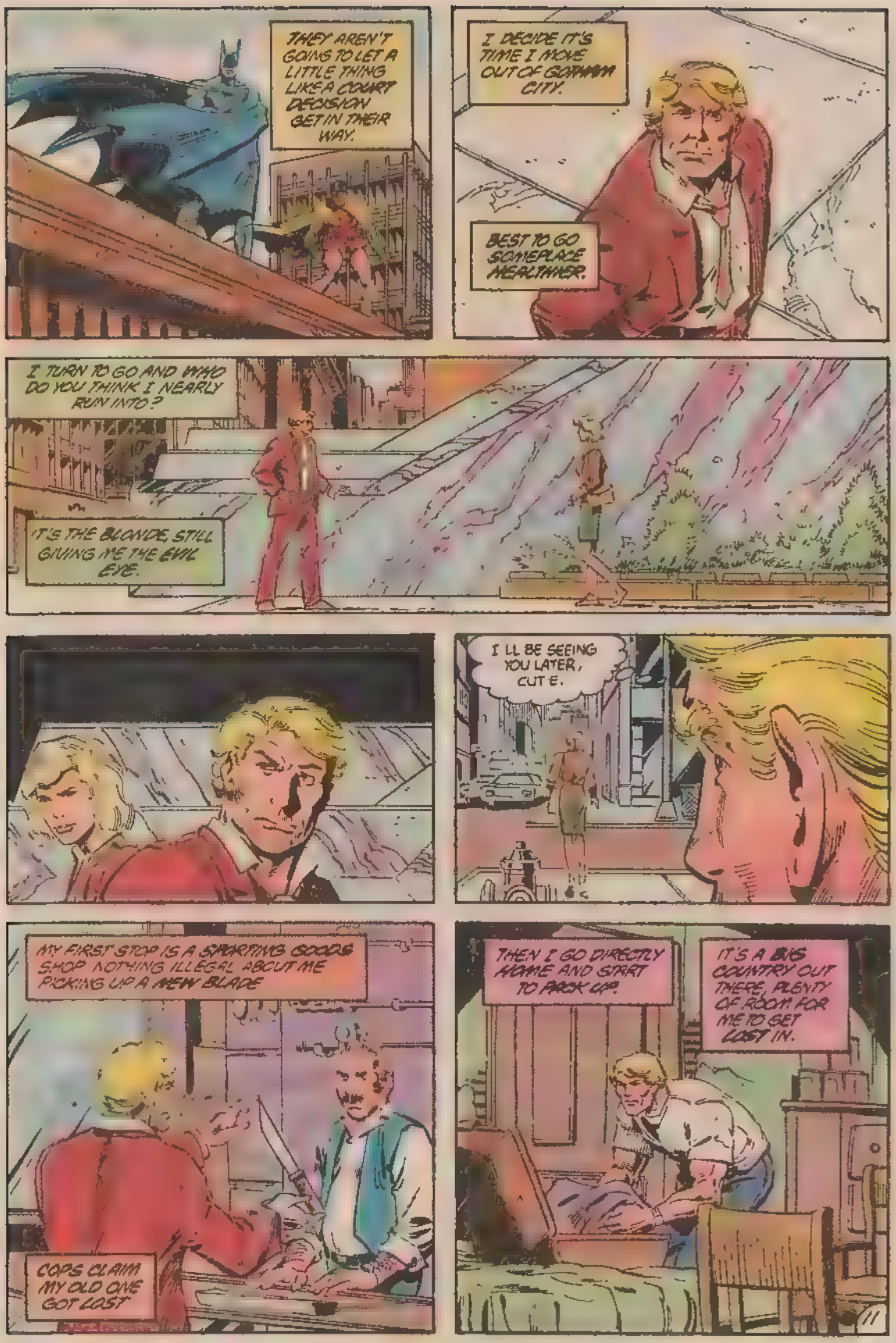
NOT A VERY IMAGINATIVE HIDING PLACE, BRANNECK.
I'M SURE A BENZENE TEST WILL UNCOVER BLOOD TRACES ON THIS KNIFE.

ANOTHER TEST WILL SHOW THAT IT'S VITO'S BLOOD TYPE ON THE BLADE.
VITO?

YEAH, VITO MANAGED TO ROLL HIMSELF OFF THE TRACKS BEFORE HE DIED.
THE TRAIN MISSED HIM. LEFT US PLENTY OF EVIDENCE TO WORK WITH.
8

SOMETHING INSIDE ME SNAPS.
I'LL TEAR THIS WIMP APART WITH MY BARE HANDS.
I'LL...
I WAKE UP IN A JAIL CELL WITH A BROKEN JAW.
'COURSE THE BANDAGES ARE OFF BY THE TIME I GO TO COURT, THREE MONTHS LATER.
SOME OF MY PALS GET ME A REAL SLICK JEW LAWYER. HIS NAME'S BROOSKY.
9


ISN'T IT TRUE THAT BATMAN OBTAINED THE MURDER WEAPON FOR YOU?
WELL, YES
.. CONTEND THAT THIS EVIDENCE WAS SECURED ILLEGALLY.
I MOVE THAT EXHIBIT ONE-A BE DECLARED INADMISSIBLE AND THAT THIS CASE BE DISMISSED.
AFTER MULLING ON THAT OVERNIGHT, THE JUDGE HAS NO CHOICE
IT IS WITH GREAT RELUCTANCE THAT I MUST RULE IN FAVOR OF MR BRODSKY'S MOTION TO EXCLUDE THE ALLEGED MURDER WEAPON FROM EVIDENCE.
WITHOUT THE KNIFE, THE STATE DON'T HAVE ENOUGH TO CONVICT.
CASE DISMISSED
GUESS I WAS JUST BORN UNDER A LUCKY STAR.
'COURSE I KNOW NOT EVERYTHING'S ROSES.
THE JERK AND HIS LITTLE PAL ARE WAITING FOR ME OUTSIDE THE COURT BUILDING.
10

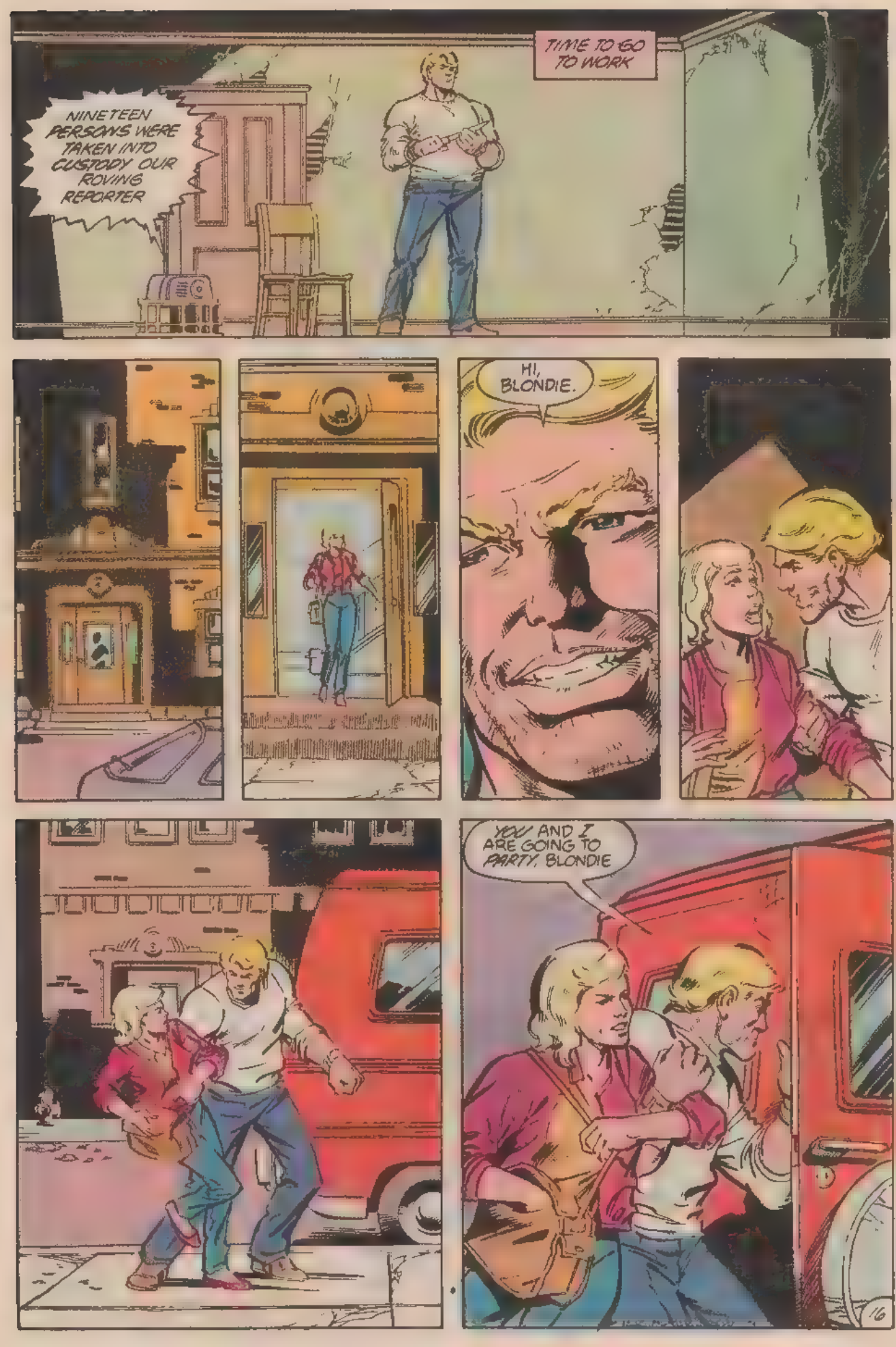

THEY AREN'T GOING TO LET A LITTLE THING LIKE A COURT DECISION GET IN THEIR WAY.
I DECIDE IT'S TIME I MOVE OUT OF GOTHAM CITY.
BEST TO GO SOMEPLACE WEALTHIER.
I TURN TO GO AND WHAT DO YOU THINK I NEARLY RUN INTO?
IT'S THE BLONDE, STILL GIVING ME THE EVIL EYE.
I'LL BE SEEING YOU LATER, CUTIE.
MY FIRST STOP IS A SPORTING GOODS SHOP. NOTHING ILLEGAL ABOUT ME PICKING UP A NEW BLADE.
COPS CLAIM MY OLD ONE GOT LOST.
THEN I GO DIRECTLY HOME AND START TO PACK UP.
IT'S A BIG COUNTRY OUT THERE, PLENTY OF ROOM FOR ME TO GET LOST IN.

I'LL GET MYSELF A NEW NAME AND START ALL OVER
MAYBE I'LL CHECK OUT METROPOLIS
BUT BEFORE I SPLIT, I'VE GOT TO SCORE ONE LAST TIME
GONNA LEAVE TOWN IN STYLE.
'COURSE, I GOT TO BE REAL CAREFUL HOW I PULL THIS LAST STUNT OFF.
THE RADIO WILL TELL ME WHEN TO STRIKE
I'VE ALREADY DECIDED WHO NUMBER ELEVEN WILL BE.
GIVE YOU THREE GUESSES WHO I'VE CHOSEN.
HEY, WOMAN!
WHAT YOU DOIN' HERE?!
12

YOU SUPPOSE TO BE OVER ON EIGHTH AVENUE, WORKING.
YOU GOOFING OFF ON ME, WOMAN?
NO, CHARLIE, I DIDN'T FEEL SO GOOD!
WHAT'S WRONG, DOLL? FEEL HURT?
UPSET STOMACH, MAYBE?
OR IS IT A HEADACHE?!
GOT HALF A MIND TO CUT YOU UP YOU LAZY LITTLE TRAMP!
YOU'RE RIGHT ABOUT THE FIRST HALF OF THAT STATEMENT.
BUT YOU AIN'T CUTTING NO ONE, TOUGH GUY.
YOU GOT A PROBLEM, HALF-PINT?
YEAH, YOU'RE MY PROBLEM, TOUGH GUY
13

THEN LET ME FIX IT FOR YOU!
DON'T MAKE ME LAUGH
YOU GOT ABOUT AS MUCH CHANCE OF STICKING ME WITH THAT SWITCH-BLADE. .
. . . AS THE AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI HAS OF BEING AWARDED THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE.
YOU GOT NO MOVES, CHARLIE!
YOU'RE ALL MOUTH!
CAN'T SEEM TO HANDLE ANYONE BUT WOMEN, CAN YOU?!
HOW DO YOU LIKE BEING ON THE RECEIVING END, FOR A CHANGE?!
HOW'S IT FEEL TO .
HUH?!

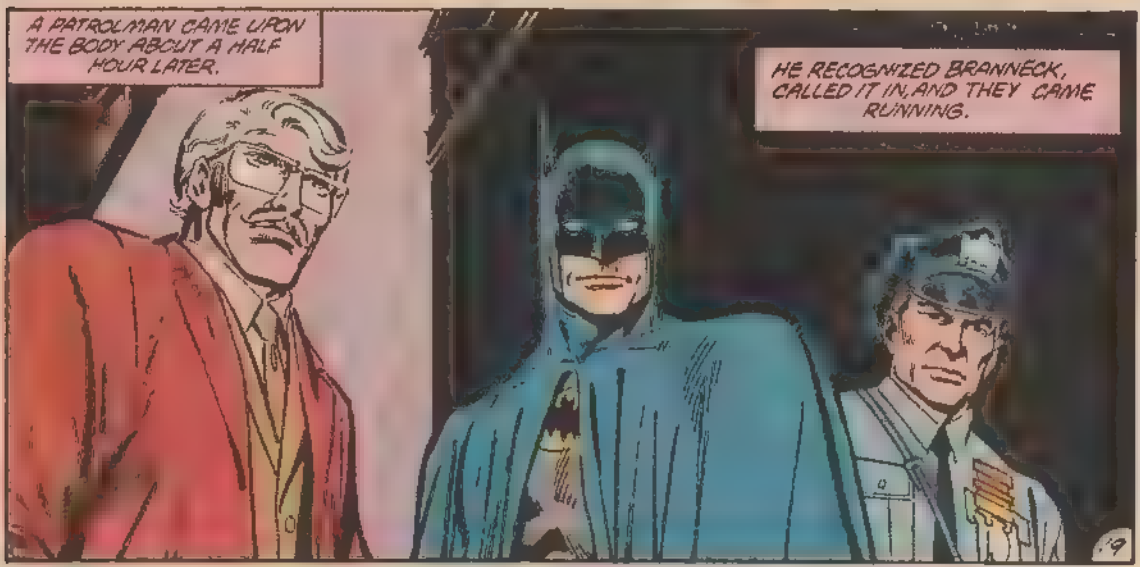
I THINK HE'S HAD ENOUGH, ROBIN.
WHAT WERE YOU TRYING TO DO, KILL HIM?
R
WOULD IT'VE BEEN THAT BIG OF A LOSS IF I HAD?
WHAT'S GOING ON IN THAT HEAD OF YOURS, JASON?
WE STILL PLANNING ON BUSTING THAT COUNTERFEITING RING TONIGHT, OR WHAT?
.. MIGHT AS WELL
YES..
THIS STATION HAS JUST RECEIVED A REPORT THAT BATMAN, ROBIN AND THE POLICE HAVE RAIDED A WATERFRONT WAREHOUSE, WHERE A MOB-RUN COUNTERFEITING OPERATION WAS BEING RUN REPORTS HAVE IT THAT...
15


TIME TO GO TO WORK
NINETEEN PERSONS WERE TAKEN INTO CUSTODY OUR ROVING REPORTER
HI, BLONDIE.
YOU AND I ARE GOING TO PARTY, BLONDIE
16

LIKE HELL WE ARE!!
THIS CAN'T BE!
THE BIMBO'S CUT ME!!
SHE SLASHED MY NECK...
MY NECK... MY THROAT...
WHAT HAS THAT TRAMP DONE TO ME?!
SHE'S... SHE'S...
. . SHE'S KILLED ME.
17

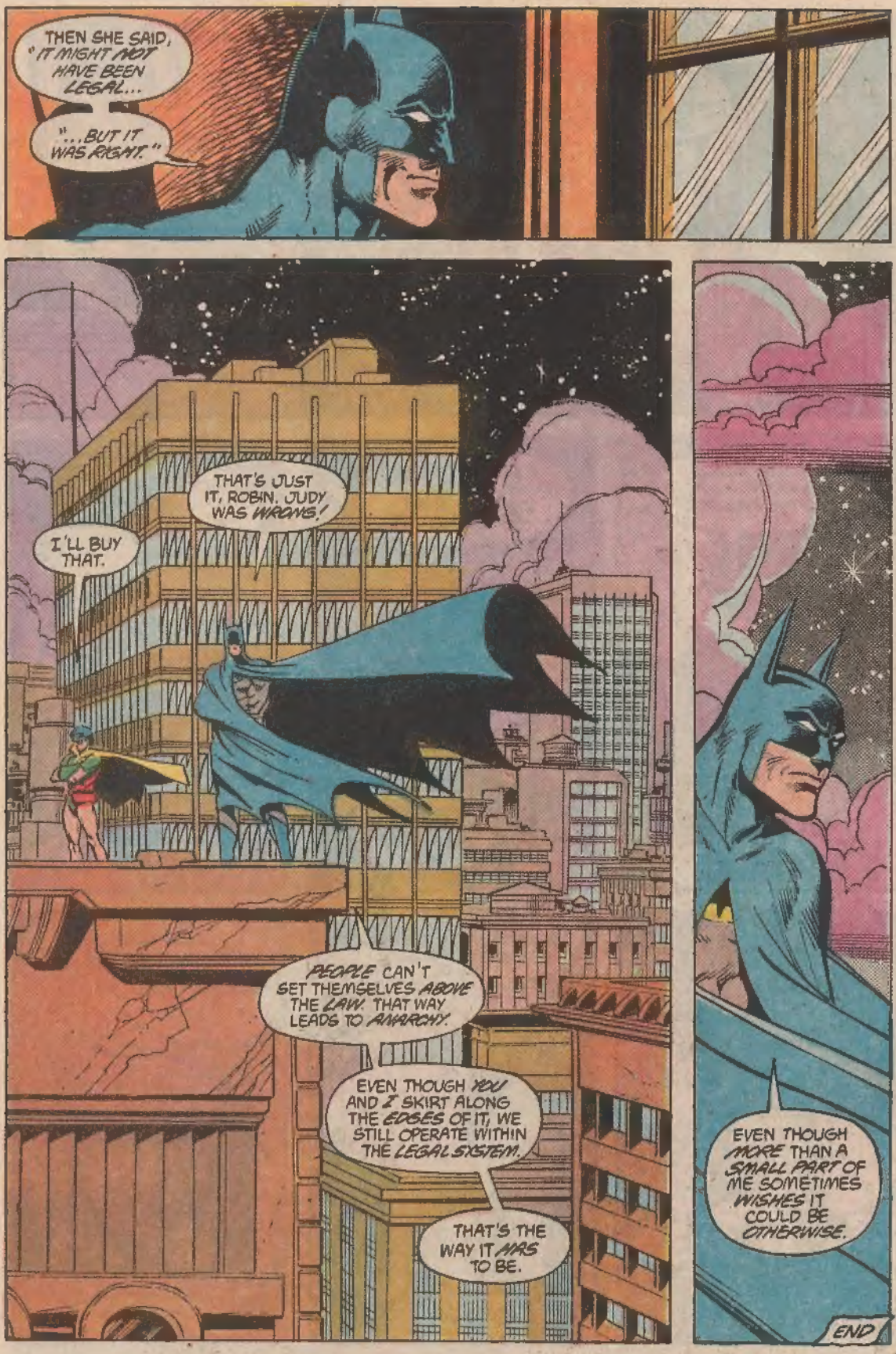
NO!
NO!
NO!
YES.
BROADS!!
EVEN WHEN YOU'RE DYING, THEY WON'T LEAVE YOU ALONE.
18

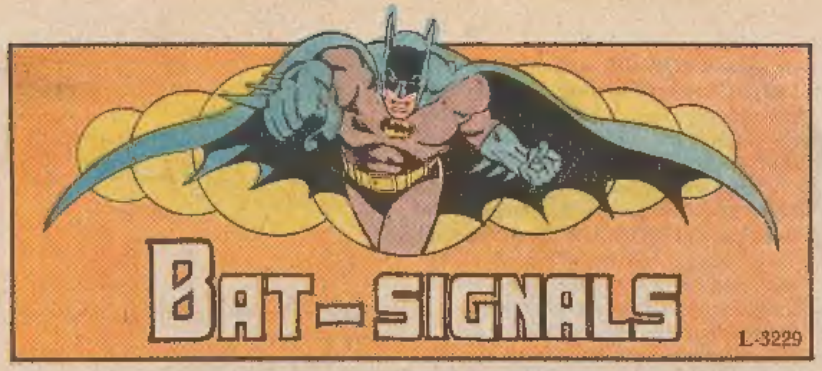
WHAT DID I EVER DO TO DESERVE THIS?



THEY DIDN'T HAVE ANY TROUBLE LOCATING BRANNECK'S KILLER.
JUDY KOSLOSKY WAS HER NAME
SHE WAS THE SISTER OF KARL AND VITO'S SECOND VICTIM, LINDA KOSLOSKY.
JUDY HAD BEEN BUSY TRACKING THE KILLERS DOWN EVEN BEFORE BATMAN GOT ON THE CASE
20

ONCE I TRACKED DOWN BRANNECK, I STARTED BIRD-DOGGING HIM.
MADE SURE EVERY TIME HE TURNED AROUND, HE'D SEE ME STANDING THERE.
IT WAS THE ONLY WAY I COULD THINK OF TO TAUNT HIM INTO CHOOSING ME AS HIS NEXT VICTIM.
IN OTHER WORDS, YOU SET HIM UP FOR THE KILLING?
THAT'S ONE WAY OF LOOKING AT IT.
YOU KNOW WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO CHARGE YOU WITH MANSLAUGHTER.
OF COURSE. THAT'S WHAT YOU GET PAID FOR.
GOOD LUCK FINDING A JURY THAT'LL CONVICT ME.
IT DOESN'T SEEM TO BOTHER YOU IN THE LEAST THAT YOU'VE KILLED A MAN...
A MAN?
I DIDN'T KILL A MAN.
I PUT DOWN A MAD DOG.
21


THEN SHE SAID, "IT MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN LEGAL...
"...BUT IT WAS RIGHT."
I'LL BUY THAT.
THAT'S JUST IT, ROBIN. JUDY WAS WRONG!
PEOPLE CAN'T SET THEMSELVES ABOVE THE LAW. THAT WAY LEADS TO ANARCHY.
EVEN THOUGH YOU AND I SKIRT ALONG THE EDGES OF IT, WE STILL OPERATE WITHIN THE LEGAL SYSTEM.
THAT'S THE WAY IT HAS TO BE.
EVEN THOUGH MORE THAN A SMALL PART OF ME SOMETIMES WISHES IT COULD BE OTHERWISE.
END



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Boy, did we get mail on "Ten Nights of the Beast! Boy. "Yeah," you're all saying to yourselves, "we read that in every stinkin' letter column, 'Boy, did we get mail.'"

Well, listen. I've never seen such a pile of letters. I'm serious. It's bigger than a pile ... it's a **heap.** *A mound. A mountain. I'm not even going to mention the variety of reactions (huge), or the amount of time we spent reading all your letters (much).*

Enough. Take it away...

Dear Jim, Jim and Denny,

Thanks for a great ending to a great story. "Ten Nights of the Beast" was very good. This was Batman at his best, matching his wits and abilities with those of the Beast. Batman came off with the greatness he is supposed to have. I loved the ending. In another company's book, he would have charged ahead and fought the Beast. Batman was right. He didn't have anything to prove by going into the room and fighting the Beast. If you guys can keep these types of stories coming, I'll keep BATMAN on my "must-buy" list for quite a while.

Keep up the great work,
George Gustines
100 W. 105 St. Apt. #C2
New York, NY 10025

*****

Dear Batpeople,

"Ten Nights of the Beast" in BATMAN #417-#420 was another masterpiece for the Batman titles. If BATMAN and DETECTIVE are not your two top sellers or at least two of the top five, then there are a lot of readers missing out on some of the best comics around today. The Beast story was highly topical, yet had a timeless context. Making the focus SDI made it topical, making it Batman's clever detective mind that solved the case makes it timeless. This story could have been told at any time in the nearly 50 years he's been around, but it was definitely in the present, and something we all know at least a little bit about.

I'm sure most readers weren't surprised the tenth name on the Beast's list was Ronald Reagan, but the way it was confirmed still worked. I don't know about other readers, but when what looked like Reagan called Batman, "Sir," I knew it was Alfred. Still, this worked too. Alfred was perfect for the part, and I'm glad to see him get involved. He's one of my favorite supporting characters. Also, having Alfred pose as Reagan set up a fabulous ending for the whole story. When Batman told Alfred to "get rid of that silly mask," I laughed. It was very funny in context, and it was in character. This makes it two Batman titles in a row (BATMAN #420 and DETECTIVE #586) that provided a humorous line for Batman that was in character, and for those who despise the 1960s Batman TV show (I love it), neither line was campy. Tell Starlin, Aparo and DeCarlo, along with anyone assisting them, to keep up what they're doing, which is interesting Bat-stories.

Stephen Cade
339 12 Avenue N.W.
Calgary
ALBERTA

I'll tell them, Stephen.

*****

Dear Denny,

Part III of "Ten Nights of the Beast" in BATMAN #419 continued to be as exciting and as thought-provoking as the first two installments. In most four-parters, the writer has a tendency to pad the story in order to fill up the 88 pages. Not so in this case. Jim Starlin is doing a helluva job in maintaining the terror, the awe-inspiring tenacity of the KGBeast and the relatively straightforward narration of our favorite creature of the night.

I only have one question: When is the illustrious aforementioned comics legend going to draw a Batman story as well? Wouldn't that be something?

Characters in comic books are not supposed to be alive. They are only four-color creations of people in the business to earn a buck, right? So why do I find myself holding my breath as the Batman goes through the paces of trying to corner his adversary? Step by careful step, location to bloody location, but always a little too late to stop the killing. I can feel his frustration. I sympathize with the anger that is growing inside him and continuing to reach even more mammoth proportions. I'm impressed.

There are only three more days for our illustrious, intrepid crew to stop this killing machine from doing in the President. Will they make it in time?

Roger D. Case
1199 Waterfront Drive #202
Virginia Beach, VA 23451

Roger, we have no immediate plans for our star writer to become our star artist. We've already got one. Thanks for writing in again.

*****

Dear Sir Denny,

The biggest problem that exists in comic books for me is the lack of research done in putting them together. In order to craft a believable story of international intrigue, it is necessary to get the facts straight.

In the current storyline, Jim Starlin shows his ignorance. Up until now I had been a great admirer of Mr. Starlin's work. But his misrepresentation of the Shi'ite Muslims is inexcusable. It is a slap in the face to Muslims in general and Shi'ites in particular.

The Shi'ite Muslims are a fanatical, fundamental, militant arm of Islam. They are currently in control of much of Beirut and its surrounding territories. They are responsible for the Iranian revolution. They are the only military force in the world to turn back the Israeli war-machine. Their sole purpose in life is the creation of an Islamic nation. For this they are willing to die as warriors of Allah. They will do anything in the name of Allah. But the Shi'ites are not murderers.

Unlike the Hizanbollah, the Shi'ites do not kidnap people. Every death for them must in some way complete their ultimate mission, an Islamic State.

Salari cannot, *cannot*, be a Shi'ite. A Shi'ite would never ally himself with a godless Soviet. That is blasphemy. The assassination of Anwar Sadat proves that Muslims, especially fundamental Muslims, hate the socialists as much as the West. To ally oneself with an enemy of Allah is to commit a mortal sin. Salari cannot be a Shi'ite.

This lack of research appals me. Mr. Starlin obviously knows nothing of the Shi'ite other than what he hears through the media. He hears "car bomb" and "Shi'ite" and instantly assumes that all Shi'ites do is kill people and deal in arms. This serves to further hatred against Muslims through ignorance and misinformation.

I condemn acts of terrorism in the Middle East. Murdering in the name of God is wrong. But unlike Mr. Starlin, I understand the reason these acts are done. While I find it neither glamorous nor heroic to accept a suicide mission, I know *why* they do. Jim Starlin does not. He only knows the headlines. His lack of concern for the *facts* is not only an insult, but also dangerous.

I enjoy the adventure that comic books provide. I especially like stories with a realism of their own. It is not impossible to create stories fusing headlines with the comic book genre. Mike Grell's GREEN ARROW and *Jon Sable* are proof of that.

His research is evident and plays a vital part in the storyline. If Mr. Starlin is not willing to do this type of research, then he should stick to writing cosmic heroes like *Dreadstar*. He obviously cannot handle the real world.

Until comic book writers are ready to do the extra work to create a realistic world, comic books will remain just that.

COMIC books.

Respectfully yours,
Michael P. Isip

First of all, I should mention that the opinions expressed in the above letter do not necessarily reflect those of DC Comics or the BATMAN editorial team. Second, Michael, while you raise a series of valid points about the nature of misinformation and fact-distortion, I think you should keep in mind that BATMAN is a comic book and is, by definition, melodrama. While this in no way excuses malicious misrepresentation of the truth, it does provide for a certain amount of creative license. In BATMAN #417, the character to whom you refer is said to be "an Iranian Shi'ite terrorist." This doesn't mean that he is representative of his people, or his family, or his religion, or his countrymen. While realism in comics is important and is growing more important every day, I feel that Jim was well within the boundaries of good taste for the genre. I am sincerely sorry that you were offended by this characterization, but I do not believe that it was a "slap in the face to Muslims in general." Based on that sort of thinking, we would be precluded from mentioning any sort of race, religion, philosophy, or even science, without first printing a two-page disclaimer or a letter such as yours after the fact. And where would our much-desired realism be then? Thank you for writing, Michael. I hope you don't take my words the wrong way.

*****

Dear Denny,

After reading the second installment of "Ten Nights of the Beast" in BATMAN #418, I'm convinced of two things.

1) The two Jims, Starlin and Aparo, are a sensational combination. Aparo has always been one of my all-time favorite Bat-artists, and together with Mike DeCarlo, he is producing some vintage work ... and—

2) The mini-series within a series concept is the way most mini-series should be presented. I really think that the mini-series thing is getting out of hand. Most ordinary folk like me are finding it hard to *afford* to keep up with all the new material being presented almost every month in this format. I understand the marketing philosophy behind all the issue is being pumped out. Everybody thinks in terms of owning as many first issues as possible and I'm sure this sells lots of comics. Now I can't speak for everybody, mind you, but I personally see through this bonanza of mini-series, and see it merely as profiteering. I can remember the time when a mini-series resulted in some fine work being produced: CAMELOT 3000, WATCHMEN and DARK KNIGHT come to mind. Lately, though, LEGENDS and MILLENNIUM (DC's worst effort ever) have made me re-think my purchasing position. So for my money, I'll stick to the mainstream characters.

Thank you for presenting "Ten Nights of the Beast" within the regular continuity as you did BATMAN: "Years One and Two." I feel that Byrne's "World of Krypton" and "World of Smallville" should have been presented the same way.

Now that I've finished having a go at DC, allow me to add that your company is second to none overall, and harking back to BATMAN #418 for a minute ... well, it was just great.

The cover, together with #417's, are the best two covers of the year. Bear this in mind, though. I do NOT like to see BATMAN *outclassed!!* He's the best. So hows about some revenge? One final point. Eighty people dead in one hit! Isn't that a bit gross ... not to mention overdone. That's enough to start WWIII. Let's not get carried away, okay?

Best,
Steve Wren
92 Derby Crescent
Chipping Norton NSW 2170
AUSTRALIA

Okay.

Incidentally, Steve, I'm not going to mention the fact that you come from a town called "Chipping Norton."

*****

Dear Denny,

Allow me to share some thoughts on BATMAN #419:

Mike Zeck drew a great cover.

Jim Starlin has an excellent sense of dramatic structure and pacing. He understands his main character. He has created an interesting new villain.

Jim Aparo's doing the most innovative and dynamic pencilling he's done in years. Mike DeCarlo's inks and Jim's pencils work well together.

I'm enjoying "Ten Nights of the Beast."

Hey, who says letters to comics need be verbose?

Frank Balkin
(Address withheld by request)

*****

Dear Batman,

You're being stymied by a villain so stupid that he would cut off his own hand instead of cutting the rope binding the hand. You're slipping in your old age. So is the writer of this travesty of the Batman legend. Great plot, but everyone in this insipid tale has the IQ of a grape.

Greg Randall
352 Atherton Hall
University Park, PA 16802

We got a bunch of mail on this particular point. The Beast didn't have the time to start cutting the cable again. It would have taken three chops of the ax before *his left wrist got snared. With the cops on the way, I guess he opted for the quicker (if more painful) way out of the snare.*

That's it for this month, folks. See ya around.

Write in.

Aloha.

—Dan Raspler
Assistant Editor

From the Den

Now it can be told. In fact, now it *should* be told.

Who is J.J. Birch?

That is, who is the guy who took over the pencilling chores for several issues of FIRESTORM while the book's regular penciller, Joe Brozowski, was treating himself to a much-deserved vacation? What else had the guy worked on? Where did he come from?

Well, J.J. Birch is, as some FIRESTORM readers guessed, a pseudonym. J.J.'s real name is—

Joe Brozowski.

Which, of course, only raises more questions. Why would a respected veteran like Joe alter his style *and* hide behind a phony name to work on a book he was already doing? Only Joe himself can really answer, but I'll offer a few speculations. I think Joe wanted to try something different—a style that was, for him, a radical change—and I think he wanted to try it without being judged by his previous work. He may have felt that if you like his art, you'd be hostile to the new stuff—after all, he'd be changing what was already good—and if you weren't fond of his pictures, you'd tend to prejudge the new stuff unfavorably. The answer was to create a new artist as well as new drawings. Enter Mr. Birch. ("Brozowski," by the way, is "Birch" in Polish.)

As I noted, after a few issues of FIRESTORM, we retired J.J. to whatever limbo is reserved for people who never existed. So was J.J. a failure? I don't think so. It is a disconcerting fact of the creative life that the artist either changes or becomes stale and bored, and eventually that boredom communicates itself to the audience. As Norman Mailer wrote someplace, one must either move ahead or pay an ever-increasing price for remaining in the same place. Joe moved. Challenged himself and in the process learned a few things about the skills he is always trying to perfect. The result is that although he is again working in the familiar Joe Brozowski style, he has improved it. People seldom return unaltered from ventures into alien territory.

I admire Joe's effort and I'd like to tell him, here and now, that it was a pleasure to meet J.J. Birch, however briefly.

DENNY